



**Vancouver  
Community  
College**

# **VCC Environmental Sustainability Strategy**

2023 – 2028

# Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Vancouver Community College (VCC) is located on the traditional unceded territories of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəḿ (Musqueam), Sk<sup>w</sup>x<sup>w</sup>ú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples who have been stewards of this land from time immemorial.



## Message from the President and Board Chair

For over 50 years, VCC has proudly stood as a pioneer in providing innovative and experiential post-secondary education in British Columbia. We cherish our rich legacy and remain committed to making an even greater impact in the years ahead.

Our Strategic Innovation Plan has been carefully crafted to meet the evolving needs of our students and the sector, establishing a learning environment that will serve our community and province for generations to come. Integral to this plan is our unwavering dedication to environmental sustainability. We take full responsibility for our environmental footprint and, through this strategy, we are embarking on a five-year journey to embed sustainable practices and values throughout our organization.

At VCC, we firmly believe that progress is intrinsically tied to advancing equity, accessibility, and reconciliation. These principles have profoundly influenced our plan and will continue to steer our path in the future.

We sincerely appreciate your partnership as we collectively shape the future of VCC. Together, we can make a lasting difference.

Sincerely,

**Joey Hartman**  
Chair  
VCC Board of Governors

**Ajay Patel**  
President and CEO  
Vancouver Community College

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## **Introduction**

VCC's [Strategic Innovation Plan](#) provides a blueprint for how we will re-shape our campuses, programs, business models, and partnerships to meet the needs of our students and industry within today's ever-changing context. Our vision is to become a leading post secondary institution in BC with a set of tangible shared goals for program evolution, campus development, fiscal sustainability, and social responsibility.

Braided into these goals, is our commitment to environmental sustainability. We are accountable for our environmental impacts and, with this strategy, are taking steps over the next 5 years to continue to embed environmental sustainability values and practices across the organization.



## The Planning Process

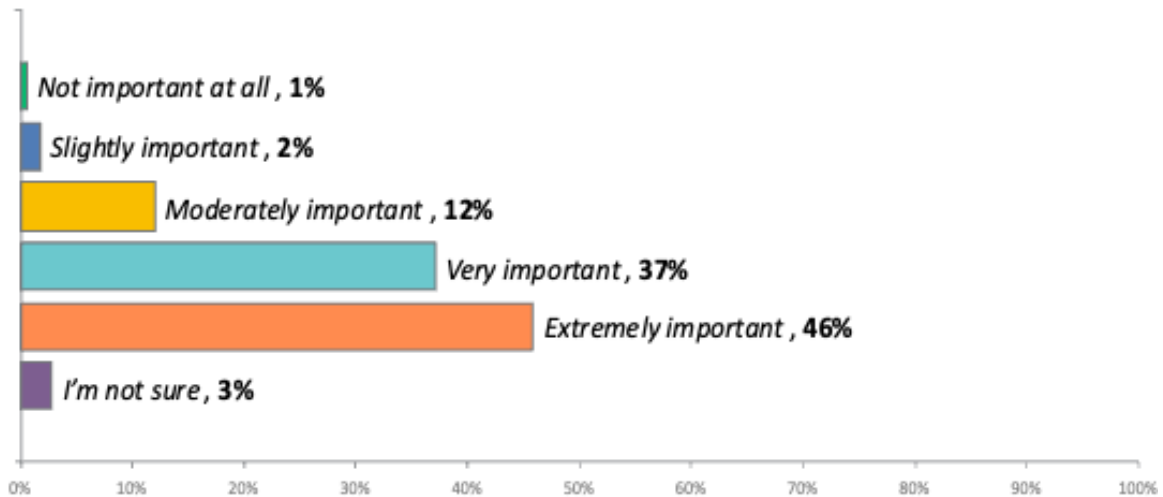
Our environmental sustainability efforts are led by VCC's Environmental Sustainability Advisory Group (ESAG), an advisory group comprised of leaders from across the organization. In the fall of 2022, the ESAG convened with a mandate from senior leadership to develop a strategy that will guide VCC's environmental sustainability actions over the next five years.

To build upon VCC's history of environmental stewardship and identify new opportunities for impact, the ESAG reviewed existing internal plans, policies and initiatives and conducted an external scan of our peers' efforts. We conducted two ESAG workshops to develop the strategy and engaged the campus community with an online survey for students, faculty, staff, administration, and other VCC stakeholders.

Photo: Results from the ESAG Workshop.

## The Planning Process (Cont'd)

How important is it for VCC to take action on environmental sustainability on our campuses?



The results of our internal and external review and stakeholder engagement activities are reflected in the 5-year Environmental Sustainability Strategy outlined in the following pages. We have aligned our strategy with the AASHE STARS, a framework for assessing sustainability performance at higher education institutions. VCC will continue to work in all areas of the STARS framework (See Appendix A for a summary of the STARS Focus Areas); however, we have prioritized nine focus areas to set achievable goals for the next 5 years of environmental sustainability action at VCC.

# Environmental Sustainability Vision

VCC is engaged in discovering and enacting ecological and equitable practices that support well-being now and into the future.



## Values

Our strategy is governed by the values outlined in VCC's Strategic Innovation Plan. These values provide the foundation for embedding environmental sustainability into all aspects of our organization and offer a guiding light for action.

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**Reconciliation & Diversity:** We respect and celebrate our differences, and are committed to the work of decolonization, accessibility, and inclusivity for all.

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**Excellence:** We are committed to the highest educational quality, student support, and college operations that are responsive, innovative, and relevant.

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**Student Success:** We create an accessible environment where students build the skills, develop the attributes and gain the experience in the classroom, industry and community needed for success now and in the future.

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**Stewardship:** We are responsible for overseeing the resources that are entrusted to us and are focused on working in the best interests of the college community as a whole.

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We will embody these values in our commitment to pursue environmental sustainability by:

- Responding ethically and considering the global community in our work to support a more just and sustainable future for all.
- Working both internally and externally, to engage our broader community in collective action towards a more fair, equitable, and inclusive world.
- Carrying out environmental sustainability in a fiscally responsible manner while seeking out innovative solutions that balance financial investments and sustainable outcomes.



## Priority Areas



The overarching Governance & Leadership and Communications & Engagement priority areas are foundational to our Environmental Sustainability Strategy. They describe both an approach that we will weave into the other seven priority areas of our strategy, as well as a set of specific actions we will undertake to support accountability, transparency and engagement.

We have made significant progress in our Carbon Reduction and Energy Conservation priority areas and will continue to pursue actions in these areas because of our organization's commitment to energy and emissions reduction.

Environmental Education, Green Purchasing Practices, Waste Management, Sustainable Food Systems, and Climate Resilience represent the emerging sustainability priority areas for our institution. This is where we will focus our efforts over the next 5 years, building on the initial work already underway.

## Priority Areas (Cont'd)

### Governance & Leadership

Our focus on Governance and Leadership challenges us to infuse environmental sustainability into how we operate as an organization. To ensure we are making progress towards our environmental sustainability goals, it is important that we hold ourselves accountable for our environmental impacts, integrate environmental considerations into our decision-making, and take a methodical approach towards tracking and improving our impact.

We set ourselves up for success by embedding environmental sustainability into our Strategic Innovation Plan, reconvening the Environmental Sustainability Advisory Group (ESAG) to advise Senior Leadership, and creating this Environmental Sustainability Strategy to guide our actions over the next 5 years. We are promoting leadership at all levels with our annual Eco-College Small Grants Program, providing grants to current VCC students, faculty, and staff to develop campus environmental sustainability projects.

By approaching our environmental goals through a lens of good governance, we demonstrate environmental leadership through our actions for our students, staff, faculty, and peer institutions.

#### Our Goal

Be accountable for our performance by tracking and reporting on progress towards environmental sustainability goals.

#### Our Actions

- Hire a full time Environment and Sustainability Manager.
- Collect and monitor data to track progress towards environmental sustainability goals.
- Continued compliance with government requirements for Public Service Organizations.
- Create an implementation plan, identifying responsibilities and timelines for the actions described in this strategy to ensure success.
- Prepare VCC's first STARS submission as a Reporter and complete a gap analysis.
- Sign the [Talloires Declaration](#) or the [SDG Accord](#).
- Provide examples of leadership that start at the top of our organization.

## Priority Areas (Cont'd)

### Communications & Engagement

We share our stories to educate and inspire our students, staff, faculty, and peer institutions and amplify our impact. We offer inclusive engagement opportunities that tap into our diverse stakeholders and broaden our opportunity for awareness, engagement and identifying new opportunities.

Environmental sustainability Communications & Engagement efforts are not new to VCC. To date, we have run various engagement campaigns, such as 'Take the Stairs, if possible', 'Bundle Up' and our annual 'Holiday Shutdown.' We publish our annual emissions and energy management results and include articles in the VCC Digest to communicate about our sustainability initiatives and their impacts.

Our stakeholder engagement survey results revealed that there is an appetite for greater communications about environmental sustainability on campus. We will build on our existing efforts and continue to engage and educate our stakeholders, while seeking meaningful opportunities to increase participation in our sustainability work.

We can further promote our vision for a more sustainable future for all by expanding our communications and engagement opportunities beyond VCC to the broader community, valuing all voices and using an equity lens to bring our stakeholders together to build connections and address common goals.

#### Our Goal

Our stakeholders will understand our efforts to improve our environmental impact, while also being offered inclusive engagement opportunities to work in our community.

#### Our Actions

- Create an annual communications plan for sharing sustainability-related content throughout the year. Collect and share stories of sustainability initiatives across campus.
- Create opportunities for students, staff, faculty, administration, other VCC stakeholders and the broader community to get involved in sustainability initiatives.
- Foster partnerships with like-minded community groups to collaborate on common goals.
- Identify and improve the reach of our communication channels.

## **Priority Areas (Cont'd)**

### **Environmental Education**

As a leader in innovative, experiential post-secondary learning in British Columbia, education is the core of what we do.

Accordingly, we want to provide opportunities to improve environmental sustainability literacy on campus. We can do this through environmental communications and engagement efforts designed to increase understanding and awareness, but also by incorporating relevant topics into our course offerings to ensure our students graduate with the competencies required to support personal, community, environmental, and global well being.

#### **Our Goal**

Provide educational opportunities to improve sustainability literacy on campus.

#### **Our Actions**

- Identify and share free resources for improving environmental sustainability literacy with students, staff, faculty, and administration.
- Provide cross-departmental opportunities for students, staff, faculty, administration, and other stakeholders to increase sustainability literacy, such as workshops or Moodle resources.
- Complete an assessment of current course offerings using the STARS framework to identify existing sustainability courses and courses with sustainability-related content, as well as opportunities for expanding on those offerings.



## Priority Areas (Cont'd)

### Carbon Reduction

To combat climate change and minimize the potential negative impacts resulting from it, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has determined it is imperative that global temperature increases are limited to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels by reducing carbon emissions.

Under the Carbon Neutral Government Regulation of BC's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Act, VCC [reports on emissions](#) to the BC Climate Action Secretariat, and purchases credits to offset emissions on an annual basis. By purchasing offsets in equal proportion to the emissions we create in a year, VCC achieves carbon neutrality.

Our Strategic Energy Management Plan (SEMP) is regularly updated to include new commitments to drive further energy related emissions reductions, ensuring that we do our part and contribute to the province's carbon reduction targets.

### Our Goal

Continue setting short and long-term targets beyond 2025 to drive emissions reductions while meeting provincial requirements for carbon neutrality.

### Our Actions

- Continue to report on an annual basis.
- Continue to set and achieve short- and long-term carbon reduction targets.
- Continue to operate our buildings in a manner that minimizes energy-related carbon emissions.
- Expand the scope of carbon emissions reporting and reduction by exploring opportunities in sustainable transportation, waste, and procurement.
- Communicate efforts with VCC stakeholders and engage with them to raise awareness about campus emissions and their role in helping to reduce them.

## Priority Areas (Cont'd)

### A Commitment to Carbon Reduction

VCC's 2019 Strategic Energy Management Plan committed to reducing energy-related emissions by 50% below fiscal year 2010/11 by March 2025. As of March 2022, these emissions had been reduced by 56%.

VCC Carbon Neutral Emissions (tCO<sub>2</sub>e/year)

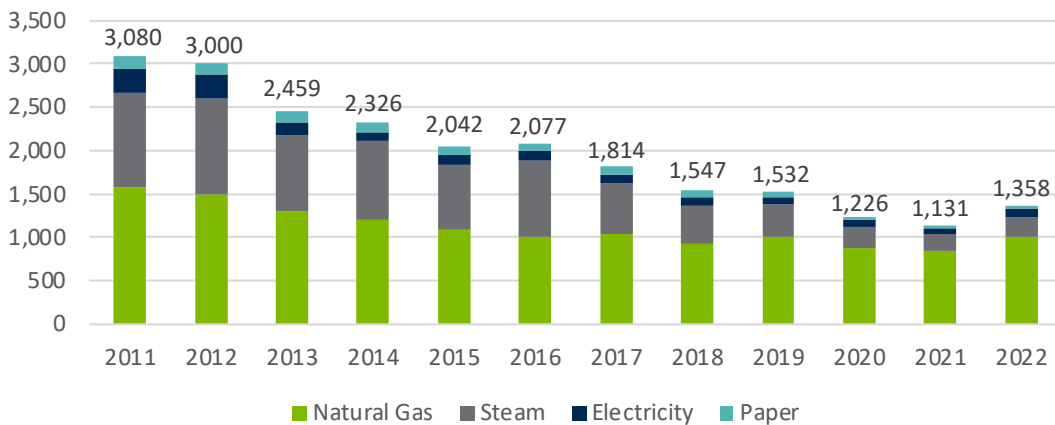


Figure 1 VCC Carbon Neutral Emissions (tCO<sub>2</sub>e/year) 2011-2022 (Source: VCC CCAR 2022)

## Priority Areas (Cont'd)

### Energy Conservation

VCC has an excellent energy management track record. Since 2013, our Facilities Management department has been identifying energy reduction opportunities and using PUMA Utility Monitoring to track and monitor our energy consumption patterns across our campuses. These efforts help to reduce energy costs and carbon emissions, and also result in numerous co-benefits such as improving occupant comfort and safety, increasing equipment reliability, and demonstrating VCC's commitment to sustainability.

Our regular Energy Management Assessments gather key stakeholders to identify new energy management opportunities within our organization, providing an action plan for continuous improvement. Our Strategic Energy Management Plan builds on previous efforts and supports our commitment to energy efficiency and conservation by providing a framework for reducing energy consumption and its associated environmental impact.

Through these efforts, we have specific energy reduction targets, an action plan for achieving the target, and monitoring processes in place to measure our progress.

#### Our Goal

Reduce campus energy intensity in existing buildings by 50% from 2010/2011 fiscal year levels by end of 2024/2025 fiscal year through the implementation of cost-effective energy management initiatives.

#### Our Actions

- Continue to monitor energy consumption patterns and optimize the energy performance of existing systems in order to set goals that comply with the province's regulations.
- Include energy efficiency opportunities in the decision-making process for all capital projects related to buildings.
- Publish articles in the VCC digest on a quarterly basis and display an energy dashboard on monitors throughout campus to share energy management stories and energy performance information.
- Maximize opportunities for funding and incentives to support energy efficiency projects.



## Priority Areas (Cont'd)

### Energy Management Results

Over the past eight years (2014/15-2021/22), VCC spent approximately \$2,470,000 to achieve a 40% reduction in energy consumption from 2010/11 levels by 2019/20.

#### VCC Carbon Neutral Emissions (tCO2e/year)

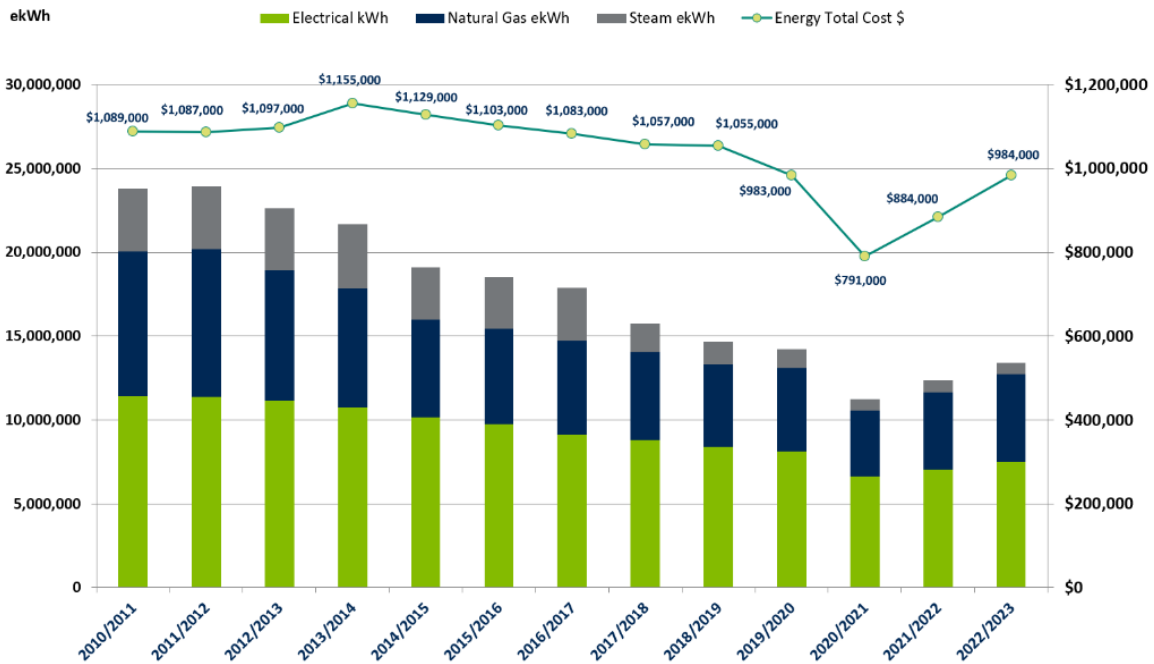


Figure 2 Historical Energy Consumption, 2010/11-2021/22 (Source: VCC 2022 SEMP)

## **Priority Areas (Cont'd)**

### **Climate Resilience**

In recent years, British Columbia has been impacted by a number of natural disasters that demonstrate the climate change hazards that we will face due to a rapidly changing climate. We need to better understand VCC's vulnerability to these hazards, the potential impact they could have, and identify concrete actions VCC can take to help increase climate change resiliency. Failure to do so could negatively impact our operations, built environment, and the health and well being of our students, faculty, staff, administration, and community members.

Our actions to reduce our carbon emissions will help improve the resiliency of our community by contributing to the global goal of limiting longer term negative climate change impacts. However, it is also important that we understand the future climate hazards our campuses will face and our vulnerability to them so we can create a plan to ensure associated risks are minimized.

#### **Our Goal**

Understand the future climate hazards and vulnerabilities our campuses will face and work towards creating a plan to ensure associated risks are minimized.

#### **Our Actions**

- Conduct a climate change vulnerability assessment of VCC's two campuses.
- Engage VCC stakeholders to develop an organizational level adaptation plan that integrates with VCC's Carbon Reduction projects and programs.

## Priority Areas (Cont'd)

### Waste Management

Responsibly managing the materials that enter, circulate, and leave our campuses is fundamental to minimizing our impact on the environment. Committing to good waste management practices, avoiding harmful materials that contaminate water, air and soil, diverting waste from landfills, and reducing demands for resources will contribute significantly to our efforts.

By reducing material consumption and encouraging reuse where possible, we can reduce emissions resulting from the extraction, production, and shipping of products. Our water bottle fill stations across campuses are one example of how we promote a culture of reuse and encourage sustainable habits on campus. We also work with organizations like Asset Investment Recovery (AIR) and BC Auction to facilitate the repair and resale of surplus assets, like electronics. When reuse is not an option, VCC's recycling programs divert waste from landfill and contribute to a circular economy.

#### Our Goal

Reduce material consumption and waste generated onsite, while improving landfill diversion through reuse, recycling, and composting programs.

#### Our Actions

- Accurately track waste and recycling quantities and set waste reduction targets.
- Align recycling and composting expectations with Metro Vancouver guidelines to create consistency with residential programs.
- Develop a system for ensuring signage is regularly reviewed and updated with current recycling and composting standards.
- Create communication materials to help students, staff, faculty, administration, and other VCC stakeholders divert materials correctly while on campus.
- Conduct detailed waste composition studies every 3 years to support the identification of new opportunities for waste reduction, reuse, and diversion.
- Collaborate with local food banks and community groups to divert left-over food waste.
- Create a procedure for the diversion of construction waste and a policy for the handling of waste related to capital project expansions.



## Priority Areas (Cont'd)

### Green Purchasing Practices

Organizations can use their purchasing power to lead change in the purchasing system and help to build a sustainable economy. As a large public service organization, our purchasing decisions are an opportunity to choose environmentally and socially preferable products and services, and support companies with strong commitments to sustainability.

[VCC's Green Purchasing Policy](#) provides guidance to encourage College Departments to consider environmentally responsible products and services as part of their purchasing decisions and to choose products and services that reduce waste, improve energy efficiency, limit toxic by-products, contain recycled content or are reusable.

#### Our Goal

Expand the Green Purchasing Policy to provide additional guidance for improving the sustainability of our supply chain, while engaging with stakeholders to ensure the policy is adopted across our campuses.

#### Our Actions

- Conduct an assessment of VCC's supply chain to identify products and services that present opportunities for embedding sustainability criteria.
- In a phased approach, expand the Green Purchasing Policy to specify institution-wide sustainability purchasing criteria for electronics, cleaning and janitorial supplies, office paper, furnishings and building accessories, construction and renovation materials, professional services, and food service providers.
- Develop a communication and reporting strategy to reinforce the Green Purchasing Policy and track outcomes.
- Become a member of the BCNET Sustainable Procurement Program and participate in initiatives that help to improve VCC's supply chain sustainability.



## **Get Involved**

Whether you are a community member, student, faculty, administration, or staff, our plan will be more successful with campus-wide innovation and collaboration.

## **Stay in Touch**

Contact us if you would like to get involved, contribute, or suggest improvements for our strategy. Please reach out to our ESAG members or contact us directly at [sustainability@vcc.ca](mailto:sustainability@vcc.ca) with your comments and suggestions.



# Acknowledgements

The VCC Environmental Sustainability Strategy, 2023-2028 was designed and developed by Prism Engineering in consultation with VCC's Facilities Management Department and Environmental Sustainability Advisory Group.

## Environmental Sustainability Advisory Group Members

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<b>Van Khanh Tran</b>	Coordinator, VP Administration (Recording Secretary)
<b>Clay Little</b>	Associate Director, IECE

# Appendix A

## Summary of Focus Areas

<b>Carbon Reduction</b>	Reducing our carbon emissions.
<b>Climate Adaptability</b>	Ensuring our systems and buildings are resilient to climate change related impacts.
<b>Education</b>	Ensuring that environmental sustainability is incorporated into our course offerings and curriculum.
<b>Energy Conservation</b>	Using electricity and natural gas in our buildings efficiently.
<b>Engagement on Campus</b>	Offering opportunities for students, staff, faculty, and administration to learn about or participate in campus sustainability initiatives.
<b>Engagement with the Community</b>	Collaborative efforts with local community organizations, businesses, or other educational institutions to advance environmental sustainability initiatives and build resilience.
<b>Food &amp; Dining</b>	Supporting sustainable and healthy food systems, such as school gardens, local vendors, or alternative protein options in the cafeteria.
<b>Grounds</b>	Reducing the environmental impacts of our grounds and gardens through sustainable landscaping practices or initiatives to protect biodiversity on campus.
<b>Investments</b>	Aligning school investments with sustainability and climate action goals.
<b>Leadership and Governance</b>	Processes and structures to promote accountability of and progress towards environmental sustainability goals on campus, with support from senior leadership and inclusive engagement of VCC's stakeholders.
<b>Purchasing</b>	Selecting green or low carbon products and services.
<b>Transportation and Travel</b>	Promoting active transportation, such as biking and walking, or shifting to public transit or electric vehicles for school operations.
<b>Waste</b>	Reducing the total amount of waste generated as well as the amount that enters the landfill.
<b>Water</b>	Using water efficiently.